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ABSTRACT

This paper begins by examining representations of gay male school teachers in discourses produced by gay men, illustrating the ways gay men represent themselves in public discourse. The literature is reviewed for answers to questions about the role of the gay male teacher in education and the responsibility of the gay male teacher to gay liberationist politics while working as an educator. Events from the author's own classroom are used to illustrate dilemmas he has faced as a gay male college teacher and ways he has responded. Ways are then suggested within discourses on gender, the body, and sexuality that offer opportunities for gay male teachers to recognize their potential contributions to the field of education and the lives of children more fully. The review of the literature shows that the personal narratives of gay male teachers reveal the tradeoffs lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people are forced to make as they move in the public sphere. Many gay men maintain sharp divides between their sex lives and classroom lives. They usually face the choice between a committed couple relationship and desexualized behavior. There is really no room for a type of gay male identity that acknowledges the value some gay men place on the erotic. Questions that the teacher may encounter include: if the teacher believes that there are many diverse and ethical ways for people to structure their social and sexual practices, is it acceptable to affirm this in the classroom?; and, if the teacher believes in casual, nonmonogamous sex, what responsibility does he have toward gay male students? Questions the gay male teacher faces in classroom situations and other encounters with students have implications for democratic education and social change. (Contains 22 references.) (SLD)

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ED 423 332

TRANSGRESSION AND THE SITUATED BODY: GENDER, SEX, AND THE GAY MALE TEACHER

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Introduction

I am a middle-age white gay male educator who has taught at the pre-school, elementary school and middle school levels. I have worked as a youth advocate, served on statewide panels addressing issues affecting children and youth, and published several books on topics of concern to kids. Currently I am completing a doctorate and teach education courses to undergraduate students at a large research university in the San Francisco Bay Area and am active in current school reform efforts.

I spend most of my work life grading papers, counseling students, preparing and teaching classes, and observing in classrooms. I attend conferences focused on contemporary school reform initiatives and engage in rowdy debates focused on school choice, equity, and multicultural educational practices. I am currently engaged in ongoing study focused on historical constructions of childhood, urban youth identities, and the effects of charter schools on public education.

Simultaneously, I live in the heart of the Castro, the primary gay neighborhood in San Francisco, considered by many to be the primary gay city in the United States. I have been active in gay liberation for almost 25 years, and have worked in gay community centers, AIDS organizations, and the lesbian and gay media. While I've certainly engaged in mainstream gay rights work, my primary interests have focused on aspects of gay

liberation which chart directions far afield from mainstream, heteronormative cultures and social formations. I am not interested in a gay rights agenda that argues that lesbians and gay men are the same as heterosexuals, and therefore deserve equal rights. I am committed to a gay liberation agenda that argues that queer cultures have much to teach mainstream America about sex, gender, and equitable relationships.

While the gay movement in the 1990s has moved politically from the left to the center (and some would say to the right), I've maintained ongoing activism based in what some would characterize as the "left fringe" of gay liberation. Let others work for gay marriage. I am interested in developing, exploring, and affirming patterns of kinship which are not based on a nuclear family structure or a traditional, "committed," gendered dyad. While gender non-conforming men and women have been shunted aside by a gay rights movement hungry for "respectable" leaders who have mass appeal because they do not threaten the status quo, I am fixated on the social and cultural power emerging from troubling, subverting, and violating gender norms. During a time when AIDS has served as a convenient excuse for social critics to declare an end to a "failed" sexual revolution, I continue to immerse myself in communities that value sex and I organize my social and sexual practices in ways which could be described as "non-monogamous," "promiscuous," or, drawing on Whitman's poems, profoundly "democratic" in spirit.

Each day when I wake up, two people move in me: the teacher and the lover. I do not view these two aspects of my life as contradictory or paradoxical, though I know others might. During most of my career in education I have juggled two identities--the educator and the gay liberationist--and attempted to understand their intersections and explore the tensions that emerge from their simultaneity. For a long time I have suspected some people with whom I work in schools and on educational policy matters would find aspects of the way I enact my sexual identity problematic. I have also noticed that some colleagues in gay and lesbian movement work discount my work in schools or have no interest at all in my educational efforts.

At times, I feel schizoid, split down-the-middle, ricocheting between extremes. I might check my answering machine at home on a Sunday afternoon and there will be a student calling with questions about white racial formations for the following day's midterm examination. The next message might be from my lover who is calling to inform me he will be late for dinner as he is meeting his boyfriend for a late-afternoon romp. I might do an Internet search under my name and turn up seemingly paradoxical listings: a selection of explicit sex writings from my latest book precedes a report from an education newspaper about my charter school research.

While life may *feel* schizophrenic to me at times, intellectually I believe my work in education and gay liberation emerges from the same source: a commitment to creating sites that resist, undermine, and throw off institutionalized forms of oppression that have become endemic to late 20th century life in the United States. My interest in school reform is motivated by a desire to see urban schools become places that expand the critical consciousness of poor young people and provide them with tools for social and political change. My interest in undermining gender as a normalizing and oppressive construct emerges from my awareness of the continuing power of patriarchy to limit the life chances of girls, women, and gender-nonconforming boys. The struggle for sexual freedom--a problematic term, I'll admit, when bandied about in post-AIDS America--for me, offers insights into the transformative possibilities of pleasure in an advanced capitalist system that has succeeded in commodifying and gaining monopoly over most forms of leisure, play, and pleasure (Bronski, 1998).

Ultimately I believe my work as a teacher is about supporting students as they become agents of transgression and activists for social and political change. My mission as a teacher is best captured by bell hooks in the introduction to her book *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994):

> The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy...I add my voice to the collective call for renewal and rejuvenation in our teaching practices...I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions--a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom. (p. 12)

Yet I often feel an overwhelming hunger to learn from other educators who share similar values about how they construct their various identities and practices and how their work in schools and with children intersects with deeply held, but often transgressive, values. I am interested not only in teaching students to transgress, but also in finding ways to continue to engage myself in transgressive activism and social practices during mid-life years when many previously radical friends are making compromises and embracing politically problematic social and economic practices. I hunger for a community of educators who live out our class, gender, race, and sex politics, not simply in our teaching or our academic publishing, but in our everyday lives.

I am most eager to learn from other gay male educators who may face similar barriers, fears, and points of controversy as I. Are there ways to situate ourselves in relationship to activities common to some contemporary gay cultures such as cyber sex, drag, sex in parks, or participation in leather subcultures, without denying our own interest or participation, feeling shame, or being ejected from our profession? Are the only alternatives available to gay male teachers to remain chastely single and asexual, blissfully wedded to a monogamous long-term spouse, or maintain strict boundaries between our sexual communities, practices and identities and our teaching? Can we begin a conversation about the challenges facing male educators who do not perform traditional masculinities, a conversation that ironically has been initiated not by gay male teachers ourselves or the groups which purport to represent us, but by the film *In and Out*? Or do we have to pretend that gay male educators as a class enact masculinity in only traditional

ways and that none of us camp, lisp, utilize effeminate inflections, diction, or gestures, or cross our legs in class in the 'wrong' way?

I do not deceive myself and pretend that I represent the vast majority of gay male teachers currently working with children in the United States. The liberationist project of the 1970s has long ago taken a backseat to assimilationist values in gay movement circles (Vaid, 1995). While many men may share similar everyday stigmatized social practices and kinship formations (sexual activity which is not limited to a single, ongoing partner; gender performances which play with hypermasculinity, effeminacy, drag, and butch/femme dynamics; patterns of social relations which are centered around friendships and communities rather than a dyad or nuclear family), few maintain critical consciousness about these practices or place them in a politicized ideological framework. I want to talk with the ones who do.

I begin this paper by examining representations of gay male school teachers in discourses produced by gay men. My objective here is to illustrate how gay men represent ourselves in public discourse: what gets said, how it gets stated, and what gets silenced. I search in this literature for moments of transgression: when gay men perform identities and practices that are counter to hegemonic heteronormative constructs. Ultimately I search in the literature for answers to a series of questions I carry with me on a daily basis:

- What can gay male identities and cultures offer the field of education?

- How can my performativity as a gay male college teacher rupture traditional forces that keep in place an oppressive status quo?

- What is my responsibility to my liberationist politics in my work as an educator and what kinds of risks am I willing to take?

I next visit my classroom where a number of incidents have left me pondering, reflective, but with little clarity or resolution. I use this series of events to illustrate dilemmas I have faced and the imperfect ways I have responded. These examples appear, not because I seek to expose my own circumstance or to boldly bare my soul, but because I believe other educators of varying identities face similar challenges. Through recounting these incidents I aim to raise critical questions about the intersection of politics and teaching, identities and careers, self-care and courage.

Finally, drawing on the work of scholars of masculinities, I suggest places within discourses on gender, the body, and sexuality, which offer opportunities for gay male teachers to more fully recognize our potential contributions to the field of education and to the lives of children. My intent here is neither to produce an idealized, utopian (and intimidating) vision of what is possible, nor to suggest that a singular path must be taken to more fully integrate our identities in ways which allow both the lover and the teacher within us to inform one another. Instead my aim is to offer one possibility among many for allowing gay male teacher identities to emerge free from a burden of stigma and shame, and fully able to play a transformative role in the social change work of education.

The Discourse of Gay Male Teachers

First person narratives by gay male teachers usually reveal the trade-offs lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people are forced to make as we gain entry into broader arenas within the public sphere. As the gay drive to assimilate accelerates, it may be useful to consider what aspects of queer lives and cultures are deemed acceptable in mainstream (read "non-gay") circles and what are branded unacceptable and cast out. These questions might be pondered not only by gay teachers but by all openly LGBT people working outside specifically queered spaces. Likewise these questions may be

appropriately considered by other marginalized groups seeking entry into the status quo, who are also expected to cut off parts of themselves before being embraced as part of the American family.

Fundamentally, this is a question about democratic participation in the public sphere. When we say we "value diversity," do we mean we seek to create sites where people of different genders, races, classes, and sexual identities can come together and *bring with them the social and cultural attributes that mark them as different, unusual, transgressive*. Or do we mean that we like the *concept* of diversity but, in practice, aim to whitewash, silence, de-sex, straighten-out or overlook cultural differences? When white organizations seek to diversify, they frequently seek people of color who share their class, cultural, and ideological values. They grab at the African-American corporate attorney, the female CEO, the assimilated Cuban physician, and feel smug about their new diverse organization. They like the concept of diversity, but are circumspect about creating situations where people truly have to work across social and cultural differences.

Yet some of us believe that only by engaging in sustained work across authentic differences can social change occur (Reagon, 1983; Pharr, 1996). We believe that the historical struggles of distinct groups have produced unique social patterns and cultural responses that have much to offer the world. We seek a multiculturalism that goes beyond "heroes and holidays," stretches further than ethnic potluck suppers, and is rooted in an authentic confrontation with difference (Lee, Minkart & Okazawa-Rey, 1997). From this vantage point, some gay men usefully might serve to complicate hegemonic understandings of the ways in which kinship patterns are structured, sexuality is enacted, and gender is performed.

Yet the narratives of gay male teachers reveal that such contributions are not easily made. An analysis of stories of gay male teachers included in Kevin Jennings' 1994 volume *One Teacher in 10: Gay and Lesbian Educators Tell Their Stories*, illustrates precisely the powerful challenges faced by gay male teachers who simply seek to survive in

K-12 schools. With stories of verbal harassment, physical assault, threats of punitive action or employment termination threaded throughout the volume simply because some teachers acknowledge themselves as gay, it seems impossible to imagine gay men having any breathing room in which they can assert transgressive aspects of gay male cultures. Not only are teachers--including queer teachers--a notoriously conservative lot (Lortie, 1975), but the field of education is so intensely focused on social reproduction that pockets of resistance are few and far between (McLaren, 1995). Add to these factors the very real threats which confront openly gay educators, and a risk-averse population is likely to be created. As John Pikala, an English and Latin teacher in Saint Paul, Minnesota wrote in Jennings' volume:

> My theme has been of a person, wounded by abandonment, who is a reluctant risk taker. I guess it is no surprise that some of us gay people, since we often face threatening situations, are hesitant about taking the risk of coming out. Gay teachers in particular feel that they are vulnerable; teachers as a group are probably the most deeply closeted segment of the gay community. We fear that, should we come out, we will lose, if not our jobs, at least the support and respect of our colleagues, superiors, students, and community. (93)

This explains, in part, the failure of gay male teachers to position themselves in relation to sex in anything other than heteronormative ways. With so much at stake simply by coming out, they imagine (perhaps appropriately) the earth cracking open and swallowing them up if they talk about sexual or romantic lives outside of a traditional committed dyad. Eleven of the 23 gay male contributors to this book reference their "partner" or "lover," or "lifepartner" while the others, for the most part, are silent about their sex and relational lives. When a gay teacher maintains a relationship which approximates of serves as a conceptual equivalent of the heterosexualized construct of

cou; le or nuclear family; the relationship gains entry into the text. The gay male teacher narratives in this book lack references to any other form of sexualized male exchanges and authentic gay male community-based patterns of flirtations, casual sex, open relationships, or multi-partnerism. On the page, at least, gay male teachers are not part of the leather scene, do not engage in sex in parks or highway rest areas, and do not trick out at their local bar on a Saturday night.

I say Pikala's quote explains *in part* this tendency to silence transgressive acts because sexual shame may be another force that delimits and restricts discussions of sex. One is tempted to probe behind some of the statements by the gay male teachers in this book. A San Francisco high school teacher captures a common response of many queer educators when faced with discussions about gayness:

> I don't think any teacher wants to initiate a conversation that leads to his or her students picturing them having sex, especially a type of sex which many still find revolting. (97)

A biology teacher in Cincinnati, recounts his students' questions in response to his impromptu coming out:

> For the next thirty minutes I related my story and answered questions from my students, so many questions. "When did you know you were gay?"..."Does the principal know..." "How do you and your partner 'do it'?...For the most part, the questions were an honest attempt to get some real answers. I was candid with them, but drew a line at privacy, my own and that of others. To questions of a sexual nature, I told them that those were personal, but that what goes on between two people of the same sex is not unlike a heterosexual couple. The important

thing, I explained to them, is the love and caring that exists between the two individuals. (229-230)

Certainly many heterosexual students and faculty members continue to find gay male sex disgusting, but gay male teachers ourselves may also harbor powerful feelings of revulsion toward their sexual practices. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has suggested that disgust should be "unpacked." What many naturalize as "good taste" emerges out of powerful social, economic, and cultural processes:

> Tastes (i.e. manifested preferences) are the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference. It is no accident that, when they have to be justified, they are asserted purely negatively, by the refusal of other tastes. In matters of taste, more than anywhere else, all determination is negation, and tastes are perhaps first and foremost distates, disgust provoked by horror or visceral intolerance ("sick-making") of the tastes of others...Aesthetic intolerance can be terribly violent. (Bourdieu, 1984; 56)

When we insist that questions about sex acts remain privatized and support relegating them away from sites of public discourse, we may be buttressing an entire apparatus of social control that keeps in place patriarchy and heterosexism and makes disgust for male-to-male sex common. Some have argued that the relegating sex to the private sphere is associated with many risks and that public sex functions in radical and liberating ways (Dangerous Bedfellows, 1996; Califia, 1994). Writing about gay men in particular, Michael Bronski (1996) has argued,

> We are obsessed with sex. And it's a good thing. Sexuality and eroticism are extraordinarily powerful forces in all our lives and gay culture acknowledges

and supports that....Mainstream culture is predicated upon repressing or denying sexuality...gay culture, by its insistence on the importance of sexuality, challenges this. (11-12)

The drive by gay male teachers to privatize our communities' social and sexual practices raises a number of critical questions about how gay men consider and understand our social formations and sexual practices. Are kinships patterns that centrally feature friendship networks, or a sequence of 3-5 year long primary relationships in which we give ourselves permission to have outside sex, booby prizes foisted on us against our will by a homophobic culture culture? Or do we find meaning and pleasure in these arrangements? Are promiscuity and casual sex a pathetic but understandable gay male cultural response to widespread societal persecution and the failure to have access to the institution of marriage, or can they be seen as life-affirming practices of bonding and exchanges of pleasure, intimacy, and affection? Are our voices and gestures, movements and inflections which violate gender norms and expose us as queer, things we feel embarrassed about even as we insist they have a right to exist without harassment or persecution, or do we understand them as critically important forms of resistance to gender performances that reproduce male supremacy and reinforce patriarchal power?

I implicate myself in these same silences and denials. My own writings about my work as a gay male sixth grade teacher reflect the same tendency towards silencing heretical sex, gender, and kinship constructs as *One Teacher in 10*. In 1985, I published a book about my first teaching job which I lost after two years when I came out of the closet. Reading my book Socrates, *Plato and Guys Like Me: Confessions of a Gay Schoolteacher* (1985) today, I am struck by my own reluctance to bring key aspects of gay culture and my emerging gay identity into the text. There are multiple allusions to visiting gay bars, but always for seemingly chaste purposes. I visit Provincetown for a weekend, but there's no indication of my disco and leather bar visits. The only relationship which I acknowledge

in the book is with a Catholic priest. In real life, this relationship was quite sexual and experimented with practices that were new for me, the transformative nature of my relationship with "Tony Mosca" does not appear in the book. Instead I romanticize the relationship while I de-sex it:

> Loving a priest is not a picnic, but throughout the waning months of the year, I easily overlooked the problems. Sharing the Christmas holidays with Tony's clan was a special treat for me as I was learning to eat spicy Italian cooking and observe new ethnic customs. I envied the tacit acceptance of Tony's homosexuality by his family who--while never defining or categorizing or stating in words what was obvious--welcomed me as a son. And I was struck by the exhilaration of pulling blankets up over two big men on a cold winter evening and snuggling all night long. When Tony would tiptoe out at dawn to hurry to the seven o'clock mass, he'd kiss me on the forehead and set the alarm. I felt loved and cared for by another man--for the first time. (109)

The intense erotic connection I had with Tony is absent from the book, as are all the lessons he taught me about my body, desires, and spirituality. Likewise, throughout the book, I perform traditional masculinity as a teacher and, while this was usually the way I appeared in the classroom at this time, I certainly had moments where I was caught gesturing or inflecting in effeminate ways.

These silences about gender and sex appear in other books about lesbian and gay male teachers (Khayatt, 1984; Kissen, 1996). Why do we censor ourselves and who benefits from the silences we create? When I reflect on the 28 year old I was when I wrote this book, I cannot deny that my work in gay liberation at this precise time was powerfully transforming my understandings and relationships to sex and gender. Yet it seemed radical enough to be writing a book about being a homosexual teacher; including gender non-

conformity or sexual liberation may have undermined my intended project here. In my quest to show that I should be allowed to remain in the classroom as a openly gay teacher, I sacrificed parts of my identity that did not comfortably fit in to the world's sense of what is appropriate conduct for a teacher.

I am struck these days by the continuing silences about sex and gender that continue to dominate discourses on gay male teachers. As a member of the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Educators Network, I read monthly newsletters and see the programming at countless conferences for gay teachers. Yet I never see workshops for gay men who struggle to maintain integrity about the way we perform gender in the classroom, or read about resources for gay male teachers arrested during police raids on public sex areas. I currently subscribe to two e-mail lists which frequently present me with interesting juxtapositions: one is a list that provides daily articles about gay issues in K-12 schools and the other focuses on police crackdowns on public sex spaces throughout the nation. In stories published about the entrapment of men in park lavatories or highway rest areas, when the men's names and occupations are listed--a continuing problematic policy of many newspapers--there is almost always a schoolteacher or two in the mix. Do our gay teacher groups feel a responsibility to assist these teachers exposed to public scandal and potential job loss? Or is this aspect of these men's lives considered "conduct unbecoming," and relegated elsewhere?

Two Classroom Predicaments

Enacting Masculinity

At various times in my college teaching career I have become almost paralyzed with uncertainty about what to wear, how to speak, how to walk, how to sit, how to move.

I alternately neurotically obsess on these questions or repress them fully. I sometimes find myself spending as much time struggling over questions of appearance, voice, and movement as I do over the content of a day's lesson. I have occasionally opened my clothing closet on a morning when I am teaching to find issues of whiteness, class status, gender performance, and sexual identity enactment unleashed in a manner which threatens to overwhelm me and make me late for work.

When I am teaching *Education 188: Gay and Lesbian Issues in Schools*, I am hyper-aware of how I represent myself as a gay man to my students. I wonder how my queer students would like to see me perform gender and what my heterosexually-identified students take away from their time with me. Should I look and act like a stereotypical fag or should I provide an alternative vision of gay manhood? Is it okay to use camp, wit, and biting irony, or should I eschew the affectations of fagdom and provide an alternate vision? Is it okay to cross my legs, move my hands, raise my eyebrows? Can I call my gay students "honey"? Is it okay for me to refer to male colleagues as "girlfriends"? What image should I project when I walk across the room?

I feel as if biology has situated me in a somewhat privileged position to grapple with these questions. I possess key attributes that resonate with traditional masculinity in American culture: I am 6'4", have facial and body hair, and am built like a linebacker. I've taken what genetics has offered and made decisions which affix my position within masculine norms: I have a thick beard, speak in a deep voice, wear my hair in a crew cut, and work out at a gym. I can easily perform a white ethnic masculinity common among working class and lower middle class men. At times I look more like a stevedore than a schoolteacher.

Yet I am acutely aware that the masculinities I perform are cut through with political issues which can trigger a range of problematic responses. I may put on a performance of machismo, playing the big tough butch man, at a local leather bar on a Saturday night as a sexual strategy signaling a range of possible erotic activities and roles to the men I desire.

Yet that same Village People macho man might make me seem intimidating and unapproachable to my undergraduate students and suggest an affirming of patriarchal norms which I actually aim to undermine. In one-on-one counseling situations with gay male students I may cross my legs, affect a gentler voice, and make expressive hand gestures in an attempt to dissipate any sense of threats students may feel from me. Yet the same display of femme energy might alienate many of my heterosexual students or confirm stereotypes. It also might undercut my ability as a teacher to structure the classroom, present expectations, and enforce standards for classroom discourse and student work. Should I resist affirming stereotypes that let these students know some gay men are sometimes effeminate?

When I first began to teach college, I found that the energy I project has a powerful influence on the response of students. I attempted to initiate empowering student-focused conversations utilizing my best critical pedagogy skills. Students worked with me to frame questions and organize classroom time. We planned format and process in order to maximizing participation. Yet when time for discussion came, few students would participate. It sometimes felt as if I were pulling nails out of walls to get the vast majority of students to check-in as part of the conversation.

One of the students--a women's studies major--was kind enough to come up to me after one of my early failures at facilitating and encouraging a lively, engaged conversation. "The class is intimidated by you," she said matter-of-factly, shaking her head. "You say all the right things and clearly understand how these discussions are supposed to happen. Yet your energy--it's all wrong. It sends a very different message than the words you actually speak. You give off profoundly mixed signals"

I turned to colleagues for advice--lesbian colleagues, actually--who talked to me about gender performances in the classroom. They enlightened me about putting both my "butch energies" to work in my pedagogy and also my "femme energies." At first I did not know what they meant, but I listened intently, took a lot of notes, and mulled their

comments over in my mind for quite a while. I realized that they were asking me to apply a valuable lesson I had learned early on in my career as a gay activist to my undergraduate teaching.

I have chaired many public forums, tense community meetings, crisis-sparked town hall discussions where people of divergent groups come together for debate, conflict, and resolution. When facilitating these events, I have learned to draw on different masculinities at different times. My butch energy is useful in setting limits, confronting participants who violate collectively-made discussion rules, and keeping the group "on-task." It comes from a place within me seeking to control, direct, and order and, while the gestures, inflections, and movements that accompany it may or may not look traditionally masculine, the energy definitely taps into that particular source within me.

My femme energy is employed to open up access, invite participation, cut through and deflate tension. It employs humor, self-deprecation, campiness, and gentler qualities. I have become adept at recognizing when my femme energy will bring me things which my butch energy won't: I have some ability to dance between the two in a subtle but intricate performance of diversely gendered energies.

Hence I deliberately and self-consciously have carried my butch/femme energies into my classroom pedagogy. My women's studies student proved to be correct: If I introduce a class discussion gently, with openness and playfulness, and leave space for silences, humor, and the flexibility needed to accommodate last-minute student-initiated changes, my students respond enthusiastically. When I default to my butch energies due to fear, disorganization, or mindlessness, the students usually are silent, frozen, sometimes even withholding.

I began to consider anew the male teachers I'd known who had been explicitly effeminate, including music and drama teachers I'd had during my own high school years and one social studies teacher whose hands danced before him uncontrollably whenever something truly excited him. His enthusiasm proved infectious to us and we students

would become caught up in whatever passion he was creating in the classroom at that moment. Only after class, behind his back, would we mock him, call him names, and ridicule his style of teaching. Was this simply a case of his teaching methods successfully capturing his students' interest or was there something we truly loved about his campy gestures and queeny voice? Did these instances--moments of authentic pedagogical magic--allow teacher and students together to collectively break out of constricted gender roles and, for at least a few minutes, violate patriarchal dicta?

Educators have started to write about how sexist and heterosexist practices in classrooms harm gender non-conforming children, including boys and young men (Sedgwick, 1993; Thorne, 1993; Boldt, 1997). Mairtin Mac an Ghaill (1994) has described schooling as a "masculinizing agency" and discussed the "way in which dominant definitions of masculinity are affirmed within schools, where ideologies, discourses, representations and material practices systematically privilege boys and men" (p. 4). R.W. Connell (1995) has argued that "a degendering strategy, an attempt to dismantle hegemonic masculinity, is unavoidable; a degendered rights-based politics of social justice cannot proceed without it " (p. 232). He argues that schools must play a critical role in a move towards these politics:

> The importance of education of masculinity politics follows from the onto-formativity of gender practices, the fact that our enactments of masculinity and femininity bring a social reality into being. Education is often discussed as if it involved only information, teachers tipping measured doses of facts into the pupils' heads; but that is just part of the process. At a deeper level, education is the formation of capacities for practice. (239)

Clearly gay male teachers have a great deal at stake in developing a "degendering

strategy." Yet we are wrong if we pretend that our mere presence in the classroom, is counter-hegemonic. Being transgressive because we are openly gay, yet compliant because we affirm traditional masculinities, may do little to alter the sex/gender system that wreaks havoc in our everyday lives.

Sex, the Body, and the Classroom

It's frightening to think about the relationship between one's sex life and one's classroom, or one's embodied identities as a teacher and a lover. Many gay men maintain sharp divides between the two, insisting one's sex life is personal, private, and has no bearing on one's students. Yet the erotic circulates in any classroom and is often harnessed as a source of power which drives teaching pedagogies.

Like gay-identified men working in other mainstream cultural institutions (religious organizations, the health care industry, the political arena), gay male teachers are offered only two options: take a lover and perform with him a type of coupledom which approximates heteronormative patterns, or desexualize ourselves, stifle our erotic energies, and disprove the stereotypes of the sex-obsessed homosexual. Gay male teacher identities rarely allow men room to construct personas which do not suppress the erotic, yet also do not become leering, harassing letches who are inappropriate in a workplace. I worry that our performances within these narrow options present our gay male students--and others--with examples of gay identities which are neither helpful to them nor relevant to their lives and the difficult choices they must face in integrating sexual identity, sexual orientation, and sexual energies into their personhood.

What possibilities exist for the creation of new kinds of gay male identity which acknowledge the value some of us place on the erotic and the ways in which it enters not only our classrooms and teaching practices, but the classrooms and practices of all effective

educators? Is it possible to be seen by students as a sexual being without pandering to stereotypes or imposing one's comfort with sex on students who maintain different values? Am I ever able to find a way to support students as they struggle with their own sexual concerns without stifling my own struggles and silencing my own stories? And how can a teacher from any vulnerable marginalized population even consider such questions without undermining her/his job and putting their career at risk?

I have faced a range of issues about sex, the body, and erotic desires during the three spring semesters in which I've taught my gay studies class:

o What do I do when I find in my mailbox on Valentine's Day a single long-stemmed rose which a staff member insists was placed there by "an unknown male undergraduate" who tried to deliver it surreptitiously?

o How do I respond when a student asks me if I'll be dropping by the Bondage a Go-Go sex club on Wednesday night?

o When the weather gets warm and I'm feeling good about my body, is it ever okay to wear a Lacoste shirt to class that shows my big arms? What about a tank top or simply a sleeveless vest?

o What should I do when I'm cleaning up after a workout in the university recreation center's showers and two of my undergraduate gay male students walk in and proceed to shoot quick glances in my direction as I quickly finish showering and toweling off?

o How do I react when I recognize a former or current student at a bathhouse, sex club, or while I am in a chat room on AOL?

The only conversations in this arena of which I've been a part have focused on the ethics of college teacher/student liaisons. I answered that question years ago for myself--deciding I did not need the risk and the headaches such interactions could bring--so perhaps this has allowed this other series of questions to emerge for me. If I believe that there are many diverse and ethical ways for people to structure their social and sexual practices, isn't it important to affirm various options within the classroom? Is it possible to affirm one pattern of sexual organization without undercutting others? What responsibility do gay male teachers who enjoy and intellectually support casual, non-monogamous sexual relations have to our gay male students?

My students know that I have a lover and live with him in San Francisco. This is introduced, appropriately to my mind, during the first class when I explain why I ask them to not call me at home after 9 p.m. at night. Several have met Crispin either when we've run into students on the street or at gay community festivals and street fairs, or when he's dropped in at our class potluck suppers. I am always acutely self-conscious of how I interact with my lover when students are around: I want to be 'appropriate' but neither fully stifle the attraction and physicality between us nor elevate the erotic element of the relationship over others. When he visits me in class, I give him a peck of a kiss when I first see him, and I am conscious that I do not want to stifle touching his arm or holding his hand briefly. If I run into students on the street when we are wearing tank tops or leather armbands, I become quite self-conscious but I do not avoid greeting them nor feel ashamed to be seen or known to participate in gay male sexual cultures.

Last year, one of my students drew an analogy in class that used my relationship with Crispin in a way which revealed that the student believed we were in a monogamous relationship. I cannot recollect the precise context for this incident, but it was something similar to a discussion I've recently had with my students about the president's alleged

affair with Monica Lewinsky. During a heated discussion on this topic, one student asked me, "How would you feel if Crispin were to have an affair with some other guy?"

In fact, I know how I would feel because our relationship is not sexually exclusive and we regularly discuss our feelings about each other's 'extra-marital' liaisons. But how do I answer this question when it comes from undergraduate students who assume being in a couple is automatically equated with monogamy?

When a student, Brenda, first raised a similar question in class and displayed her assumptions about the nature of our relationship and the boundaries about sex we'd constructed, I paused for a moment and considered my response. It seemed like an important teachable moment had arrived, but one fraught with risks of all kinds. Through my mind raced a number of scenarios: the dean confronting me with evidence that I had flaunted my sexual promiscuity to my students; a lawsuit where a group of students sue me for sexually harassing them by responding to Brenda's statement with anything other than "my sex live is my personal private business"; the newspaper headlines declaring, "He Teaches at the University, but at Night He Wallows in the Sexual Gutters of the Gay City." I paused before responding, then I downshifted energy and spoke directly to Brenda. "This might sounds strange for you to hear but I feel as if I should correct an assumption that seems to lie behind your statement," I said calmly. "You seem to believe Crispin and I have structured our relationship in a manner that parallels traditional monogamous heterosexual relationships. Many couples--of all sexual orientations--choose other ways of organizing their relationship. It has been documented that gay men in particular often maintain what are known as open relationships. I just wanted you to know that your assumption doesn't fit our relationship design because we do not maintain monogamy in our relationship or believe we should control what our partner does with his body and his time. Open relationships surely have their challenges, but we've found it works best for us."

When I finished, there was total silence in the room. A few hands slowly were raised, additional students put forward some questions, I offered responses, and then we returned to the lesson-at-hand. I felt conflicted between wanting to fully exploit a teachable moment and wanting to place what I felt were appropriate boundaries on the discussion. Over the next few weeks, I heard from several students that they'd appreciated my candor and the respect with which I held them indicated by my disclosure. From that point forward, I felt the class became an intimate site for teaching and learning and that the rigid role of teacher had flexed in a way that promoted the critical pedagogy of the class.

I've had other encounters with my undergraduates that have challenged my commitment to including sex and the body in my teaching as something more than a distanced, de-personalized intellectual exercise. When I've run into students at San Francisco's Folsom Street Fair, an annual event celebrating the leather and fetish communities, and we've all been dressed in sexualized clothing, I've felt it important, when I see them next in class, to acknowledge the encounter before class in a casual, informal manner. Here I aim to show that participation in such activities is neither embarrassing nor a "big deal." One lesbian student once referenced her interest in sadomasochism in a personal reflective paper, indicating that her middle school students could deal with her lesbian identity but not her sexual interests. I felt it was appropriate and valuable to affirm her situation by sharing an incident from my own years as a middle school teacher, when students on the playground who were playing with handcuffs jokingly asked me if I'd ever seen a pair. I indicated that I owned my own set of handcuffs and left it at that.

As I recall these encounters, I realize that my aim is not to get into trouble or earn a reputation as a particularly transgressive or radical educator. Instead I believe that the stigmatizing, silencing, scapegoating and attacks that commonly surround the appearance of sex in the classroom are social practices that produce a populace which experiences sex and desire in a manner best characterized by confusion, frustration, pain, and abuse. If

critical pedagogy is about collectively gaining a deep understanding of how social and political forces interact with all of our everyday lives and help to produce our identities, social practices, and communities, then silencing, avoiding, or depersonalizing/ disembodying sex may function powerfully to affirm and reify a dangerous and oppressive status quo.

Conclusion

Jonathan Silin (1997) has argued that "Americans are alternately expansive and silent about the place of sexuality in the early childhood classroom" (214). The intense obsession with sex and schooling and the profound silences associated with it are part of an ideology which is effective at, as James Sears (1992) has aptly stated, "reproducing the body politic" (15). Keeping sex private and silencing discussion of desire, bodies, and erotic practices in classroom discourse, effectively ensures the continued marshaling of sex as an effective form of social control. As Sears states:

> Sexuality, then, is more a construct of ideology and culture than it is a collection of information about biology and the body; power and control are central to our modern understanding of sexuality and ourselves as sexual beings...How we define and express our sexuality has significant political implications...There is, then, an integral relationship between the learning of human reproduction and reproduction of social relations. Understandings of gendered and sexual arrangements, teenage pregnancy, and child sexual abuse further illustrate this relationship. (18-19)

All teachers teach a great deal about sex, whether we acknowledge it or not. What we say and what we don't say, what is voiced and what is silenced, create knowledges for

our students which contain tremendous implications. Gay male teachers, whose bodies, desires, and practices may transgress heteronormative constructs and patriarchal paradigms, could be a source of startling new learnings. This paper represents an initial attempt to trouble the comfortable notions of gay male teacher which circulate within liberal educational discourse. I have attempted to examine ways in which gay male identities and cultures might be useful in our pedagogical practices.

For too long, gay men have understandably fought a narrow battle, seeking admittance into the classroom as openly gay educators. Likewise, queer students of all genders and sexualities have worked to achieve a relative degree of safety in public schools throughout the United States. All too often, as we've made these efforts, we've made compromises and sacrifices that have gone unspoken and unacknowledged. We've gained a limited entry into the classroom by denying authentic differences between many gay men's relationships to gender roles, sexual cultures, and kinship arrangements and those of the heteronormative hegemony.

This paper is a call to dialogue about the sacrifices we have made and the implications they have for democratic education and social change.

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